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One CIA Effort That Worked

By Norman Kempster

The CIA likes to retort to critics of its record that its failures make headlines but no one ever hears of its successes. So, perhaps it is time to give the agency credit for the successful effort to influence U.S. public opinion which followed the murder of Richard S. Welch.

Only a few hours after the CIA's Athens station chief was gunned down in front of his home, the agency began a subtle campaign intended to persuade Americans that his death was the indirect result of congressional investigations and the direct result of an article in an obscure magazine.

Norman Kempster, a staff writer for The Washington Star, has been covering the congressional investigations of the CIA.

The nation's press, by and large, swallowed the bait. Few challenged the assumption that CIA critics had "blown the cover" of a secret agent.

The facts are otherwise.

Welch's identity was a secret only in the most technical meaning of the word. To anyone in Athens with any interest in the matter, the identity of the CIA station chief was common knowledge.

In some countries, the agency disguises its operatives a bit more carefully by varying their "cover" jobs in the embassy. Sometimes the station chief might be listed as a political

officer and at other times perhaps as the trade attache or some other title.

But in Athens, ever since the CIA began its activities at the time of the Greek civil war, following World War II, the agency's station chief has been carried on the embassy's books as the "assistant to the ambassador."

More importantly, the home of the station chief was well known. According to one person with first-hand knowledge of the matter, each successive CIA chief has lived in the same house at least since 1952. When a new man took over the post, the house went with it. It was in front of that house that Welch was killed as he returned home from a Christmas party Dec. 23.

The CIA's man in Athens has played an active role in Greek politics for years. According to information developed by the House Intelligence Committee, the military dictatorship that was overthrown in 1974 would deal only with the CIA station chief, bypassing the U.S. ambassador on all important matters of diplomacy.

Not only was Welch not a secret, he was not an agent as the term is defined in the exotic lexicon of spying. As station chief, Welch's duties were primarily bureaucratic. The term "agent" refers to an individual — usually a foreign national — who provides information to the CIA and sometimes plays a role in covert action projects.

Agents work at the raw edge of espionage, often gathering information from inside a foreign govern-

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